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AUTHOR Jenkins, Ken
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ABSTRACT

Basic issues about teacher centers are defined and clarified. The following nine issues are discussed and aralyzed for possible solutions to problems: (1) the definition of the concept of what a teacher center is; (2) for whom does a teacher center operate; (3) by whom and how should a teacher center be governed; (4) what are the primary goals of a teacher center; (5) how should a teacher center be financed; (6) how are the needs of a teacher center best determined; (7) what role should government, local education agencies, and institutions of higher education play in a teacher center; (8) what is the best way to evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher center; and (9) in what ways can it be determined that a teacher center is ultimately beneficial not only to the teacher but to the public school student. (JD)

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CRITICAL ISSUES IN CENTERING: A POSITION PAPER

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Ken Jenkins

American educators continue to come to grips with strategies and techniques that will improve the quality of teacher education and, by that, the quality of the instruction that we extend to our students in the public schools. However, it is all too common that programs of teacher education are guilty of the same lack of foresight we direct towards our public schools; that is, we attempt to equip a contemporary client with antiquated tools. Hence, the concept of Centering has an enormous appeal for those leaders in teacher education who have a commitment to the quality of the teaching candidates they prepare, particularly for the sets of experience we call inservice education. Centering is not a simple or simplistic answer to the complexity of problems that beset our profession. The concept contains within it numerous problems and issues that are still to be resolved; some, perhaps, cannot be resolved.

This paper was developed somewhat collegially, with a group of participants discussing the concept of Center at Education Week at Chautauqua, New York in the summer of 1976. Their names appear at the end of this paper. Its purpose is to identify and clarify a number of basic issues about Centering. Within that identification and clarification will come some analysis for discussion and possible solution. As a result of this process of identification, clarification, and analysis, a series of recommendations will be proposed. Some will be directed at various governmental agencies; others will be directed at those institutions undertaking or looking to undertake the development and creation of a Center within their sphere of

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influence.

The concept of the Center, although of somewhat recent origin, is a common sense extension of several long standing educational practices such as student teaching, inservice education, staff development, and the more recent movement toward competency based education. The idea of the Center, in perhaps its most complex sense, attempts to pull all of these threads together into an integrated model. While the Center concept had its major origin in Great Britain in the 1960s, in response to the Nuffield Mathematics Project, its precedent was established in the British Isles in the middle 1940s. Since its inception it has, like that other British innovation, the integrated day, made its trans-Atlantic way to the United States. Here the concept has proliferated and diversified into a number of different models. One model has a university enrich a particular set of public schools through inservice and staff development activities in exchange for public school assuming greater responsibility for preservice teacher candidates. This model finds its probable best example at the University of Maryland, where, although University initiated, the functioning is highly public school teacher oriented. Another model, even more public school oriented, can be found in Texas and West Virginia, where state agencies "control" the Centering thrusts, and arrange for universities to provide services to various public schools and school systems. A third model, exemplified at Appalachian State University, places the University at the hub of a consortial network with several public school systems, being serviced by a regionally located Center affiliated with the University. A fourth model is best demonstrated by the Teachers' Center in Boston and the Advisory and Learning Exchange in Washington. In this model, the Center is a teacher

generated, teacher focused, and teacher maintained entity. Little formal affiliation with agencies like state departments of education or universities is seen, although those agencies are used by this Center model. There are obviously other models, but these four seem to be most prevalent today. Someone wanting more detail on Center typology is referred to the Teacher Center Evaluation Project at the University of Syracuse.

It would seem obvious that the first question or issue would be one of definition. As uncomplicated as such a question might be, it is one of the more difficult. The essential question is, "What makes a Center a Center?" People have attended meetings, workshops or seminars involving the concept and have come away feeling, "Well, we're doing that." What is a Center meant to be? Does a Center mean physical space? The original idea in Great Britain was that a Centre would be a place where teachers could come in order to get some inservice. That concept expanded so that the Centre became a place where teachers would come in order to do all kinds of work that would be to their betterment, including socializing activities. This leads to the conclusion that a Center is, among other things, "a place."

A second factor in the definition of a Center relates to its purposes. For example, does the Center exist primarily as a student teaching center. Are they concerned with inservice education and staff development in addition to or instead of a preservice component? In what way is a Center to be a function of, a partner to, or separated from the two major institutions that influence teaching and teacher behavior, the colleges and universities and the public school system? To what extent is a Center to coordinate the exchange of information among teaching professionals? Some people feel that because they place all of their student teachers in a given school and assign

a university coordinator to that school, they have a Teaching Center. Are they wrong?

A third major factor in the definition of a Center has to do with structure. To what extent does the amount of control or the amount of rigidity in the organization of the Center make it a Center? Our British counterparts claim to have a rather free flow in the structure and organization of their Centres. Does that mean that a model which establishes itself as a consortium between a university and several public school systems may not be a Center because it has more structure? For our purposes let us define a teaching Center as follows: "A Center is a place of open exchange that focuses its organization, attention, and energies towards creating a cooperative relationship between teacher preparation institutions and public school systems. Its primary function is to coordinate, program, and assist in the delivery of services implicit in ongoing teacher education." Our explication of models on page two will serve to illustrate the breadth of this definition.

A second issue focuses on Centering for whom? It seems that currently one of the basic (and perhaps most debilitating) issues in the whole movement revolves around whether it is a teacher or a teaching center. Implicit are other terms such as, "teacher learning center" or "instructional development center," which, in their attempt to be descriptive, tend to be limiting. For instance, it would not be surprising to find some opposition from unions and professional organizations to a concept that would broaden Center participation to include more than classroom teachers. Yet there are still large numbers of administrators and supervisors, while no longer totally involved in classroom duties, are much committed to their own improvement

as educators and are supportive of those colleagues who share in that development. Are these people to be denied access to and participation in the Center because they are no longer classroom teachers? Within that same context arises the question of what kinds of things should happen? Much of the literature on Centering talks of maintaining a continuous learning environment to make better the existing processes in continual teacher education. Rewards are accomplished by credit-earning for purposes of certification or financial rewards through the development of curriculum related to the Center's activities. Renewal is an emerging dimension. To what extent should Centers serve as a place where teachers (of all descriptions) can come in order to exchange with each other or to find a sense of relief, solace or support. Is there a social aspect to Centering?

A third issue that has been discussed perhaps more than any of the others is the overall question of governance. Related to that obviously are questions of who is in charge and who controls the Center direction? More to the point, what does control mean? Is control the kind of entity that says a Center can or cannot undertake a particular activity without the expressed approval of the clientele of that Center, or is control a matter of defining what the parameters of decision-making are for any given portion of the decision-making process? Obviously related, if administrative control is assigned to a Center director (who we think should serve with the blessing and approval of all those constituencies serviced by the Center) to whom should that director report?

It would seem, therefore, that the basic questions related to governance are not only those that we've asked but these following as well. Who or what constitutes the leadership of the Center? While that leadership may

be deposited in the person of an administrator, who has undertaken to exert the leadership to have the Center become an entity in the first place? It seems that answer may determine the question of control. However, if the teachers' organizations are those agencies that lobby, bargain and negotiate for the creation of a Center, then the question of control has in part been answered. If leadership comes from an institution of higher education, with participation from and involvement by teacher's organizations, the the location of control might change.

A second question refers back to the previous question of Centering for whom? Who is the clientele? If a Center is to be as participative as possible, it will need to identify and involve the various publics that it is attempting to service. No governance model, however simple or complex, would be more than a scrap of paper if it ignored, either patently or by omission, the participation of the major constituencies in its operation.

Fourth, what are the Center's goals? If a Center exists primarily for the functioning of preservice education, the issue of control and the issue of governance will be different from those where the goals are aimed toward a Center for reward and renewal. A Center whose major function is to create a place where teachers can gain psychological and professional uplift would certainly have a different locus of control than would a Center whose function is to improve the quality of preservice education.

A fifth issue or question revolves around who is paying the freight? It is obvious that any agency investing its own capital, particularly if that capital is as hard to come by as today's public school and university budgets tend to be, will want to have some major say in the direction and purposes for which those funds will be spent. A Center operated for teachers

but payed for by public schools and universities will not be able to become the exclusive governing domain of the teachers. Teachers can have a major voice in the determination of Center policy and direction. They cannot say that the people who foot the bill are to be shut out of the decision-making process.

With these questions still fresh in mind, it might be advantageous to look at the more prevalent models for governance that seem to exist in the Centering movement. The consortial governance model is perhaps the most apparent. As in any other consor[illegible], the various agencies that make-up the consortium contribute to a central fund for purposes of operating the consortium itself. Each of the contributing agencies appoints a representative to sit on a board of directors which has authority to hire an executive to administer the Center and to whom the administrator reports. The board operates as a policy making and policy approving body, much as a school board does. The most prominant examples of the consortial arrangements for Centering might well be located in Atlanta and Dallas.

A second major model is that of collaboration. It differs from the consortium in that one agency assumes leadership for the development and staffing of the Center. That agency then creates a consortial organization with other agencies. For example, it could be a university establishing a consortium with a number of public school systems in a geographic area or that a public school system could establish a consortial arrangement with a series of colleges and universities. In either case the function of the leadership agency generally is to organize the Center and provide the administrative staff. Each of the agencies then contributes, mostly in kind, to the function of the Center. That might be in the form of space, office equipment,

furniture, access to instructional materials, and instructional equipment. In the collaborative model, there is a representative advisory board whose function it is to recommend policy to a director who operates within the framework of approval from the participating agencies. Veto rests with the administrative representative of the contributing agencies, and not with the director of board. The two best examples of these arrangements might well be found in the teaching centers at Appalachian State University and in the state of Rhode Island.

The third most prominant governance model is that of partnership. In this arrangement each of the contributing agencies carries an equal share in the burden and an equal say in the naming of personnel, philosophy, function, and purpose. In this case, agency also is meant to represent the clientele. A board of directors operates to set policy which governs the directions of the Center. The partnership model is similar to both the consortium and the collaborative model with one major extension: parity. It is in the partnership model that parity becomes real. Each representing agency and constituency share proportionally in the decision-making process. It is, of all the models, perhaps the most participative. It is a closer analogue to the British counterpart than are the other two. The most prominant example of this model might well be found in the Centers developed in Maryland, West Virginia and San Francisco.

It would appear that resolution of questions of governance require that the following be clarified:

(1) The purposes of a Center must be clearly established. Its goals mutually arrived at must form an operational and working philosophy that serve as the parameters for decision-making by the board and/or administrator.

(2) That in the governance structure there be a clear recognition of the funding sources. This is a political rather than a philosophic consideration, in that it would appear likely that a source for funding that was shut out of the decision-making process would quickly dry up.

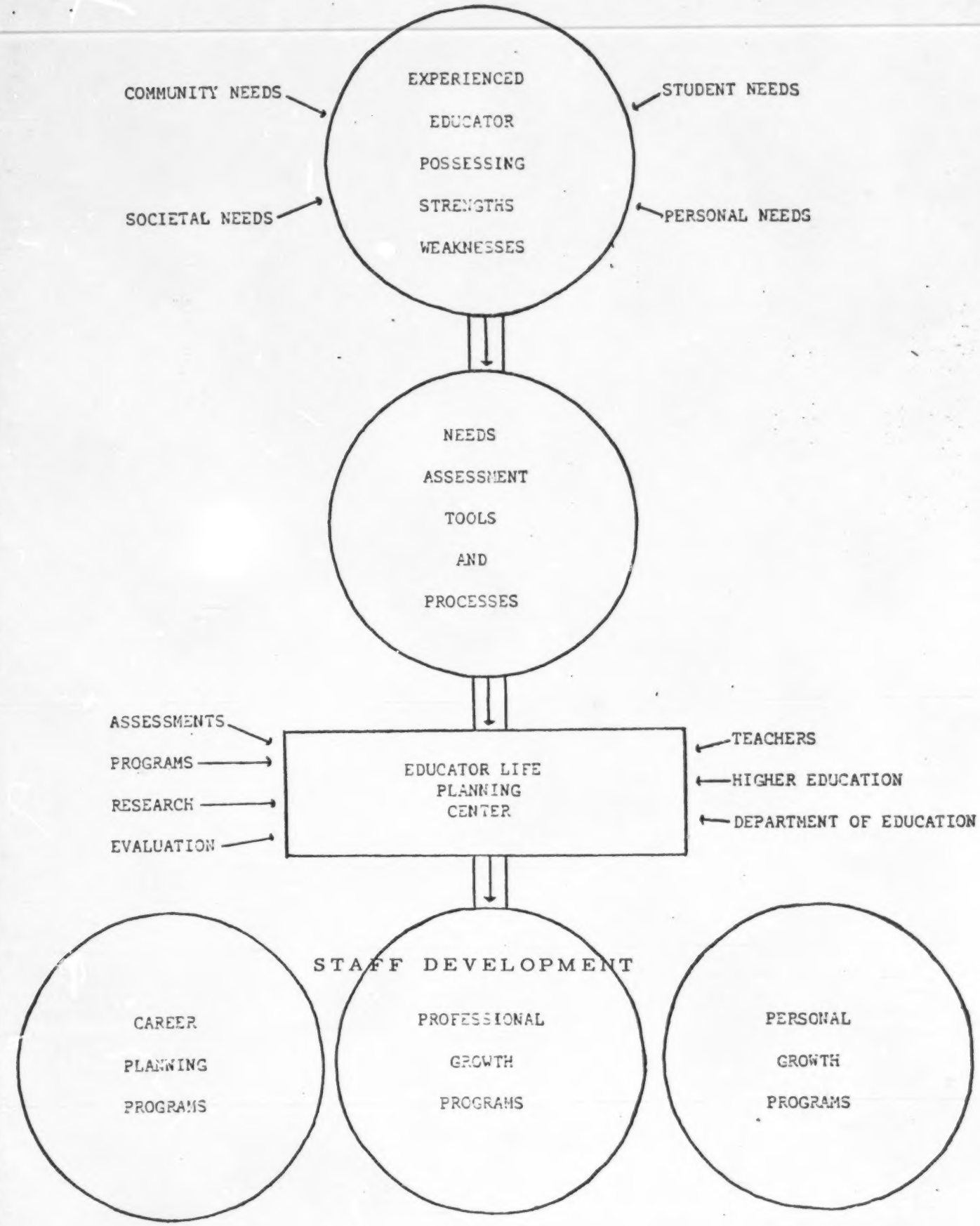
(3) The question of recognition verses control would need to be addressed. One must recognize and seek representation from those who will participate in the Center. That does not mean that control necessarily rests with one agency. There is distinction between control and leadership.

(4) There must be a recognition that someone must make decisions for the organization to function in any kind of effective manner.

A sixth major issue in the development and function of Centers lies in the area of needs assessments. Essentially most processes for needs assessment that we experience in the relationship between public schools and the universities has turned out to be largely a packaging of rather conventional courses and workshops, usually designed to meet the specific needs of a school system but not always the professional or personal growth needs of the instructional staff. In any needs assessment process there is a priority for creating an information or data gathering model which will go beyond the traditional course format into different kinds of arrangements which will promote learning. For example, why could not a Center be the agency in which a number of practitioners in the system use that Center as a vehicle for exchanging some of the things they do successfully in classrooms. Other teachers, when confronted with similar situations or problems, will not need to be re-inventing the wheel. Why not have the process of teacher evaluation become a true evaluation in the sense that out of that process comes the commitment on the part of the professional to seek, in the Center, those experiences, activities, and meetings that will contribute to the filling of a void. What we are discussing are ways in which on short term,

ad hoc basis, teachers and principals, supervisors and administrators become involved in meeting commonly agreed upon needs and finding the resources to deal with those particular kinds of problems. The third and perhaps the most important of the issues regarding needs assessment deals with the area of dissemination and responsiveness. There needs to be as little a credibility gap as possible between what the clientele say they need and what is actually delivered to them. If we ask for their input into what their needs are, and they respond, and then we deliver in other kinds of ways, then the credibility for the effectiveness of the Center is hampered if not destroyed. We must be prepared either to deliver or to put prior limits on what we can and cannot deliver, or at the very least be able to respond as to why we cannot deliver at this time those things that the clientele have said they needed. Then, once we have some results and ideas of how the Center is functioning, there must be a medium of dissemination so that superintendents and associate superintendents, principals, teachers, students and student teachers know what the Center is about and what kind of services are available to them.

Michael Crosby has developed the following idealised model for a Center based upon the interplay between needs assessment, staff development and the professional. The tacit assumptions underlying the Crosby model are: (1) Higher education has been, is, and probably should be research oriented (an assumption that raises considerable protest from higher education representatives); (2) The tools of needs assessment need much refinement and direction; (3) The person in greatest need of a Center is the experienced professional; and (4) Staff development programs, Center located or otherwise, are focused on professional growth. The following graphic represents the Crosby model.


COMMUNITY NEEDS
STUDENT NEEDS
EXPERIENCED
EDUCATOR
POSSESSING
STRENGTHS
WEAKNESSES
SOCIETAL NEEDS
PERSONAL NEEDS
NEEDS
ASSESSMENT
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PROGRAMS
RESEARCH
EVALUATION
EDUCATOR LIFE
PLANNING
CENTER
TEACHERS
HIGHER EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
STAFF DEVELOPMENT
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The model starts with the experienced educator who, in the midst of numerous impinging pressures, possesses his/her own set of strengths and weaknesses. Through the (to be refined) needs assessments, the educator takes the assessment results (perhaps in a diagnostic/prescriptive mode) to the Center. This agency is a clearinghouse and a medium. It conducts internal program assessments, research, and evaluations, and provides interface for educators, colleges and universities, and governmental education agencies. Out of that exchange comes the staff development activities, represented by the three bottom circles. The middle circle is already well established, both in credibility and operation. It is in the two outer circles that this model finds its most unique nature. This Center puts on priority level opportunities for the educator to grow personally ("Help me become a better person, not just a better teacher.") It also recognizes that the diversity of opportunity in education is expanding. Thus a career planning component is built in. However, idealized, and however flawed the assumptions, the Crosby model offers much needed synthesis and direction to the Centering concept.

At some point in the process of the discussion of issues one must invariably deal with the question of finance, legislation and the role of governmental agencies in the development of Centers. A teaching Center is not one of those innovations that can be done at no additional cost. It requires, at least, a shifting of funds, if not additional monies. At some point there are going to be some direct monetary costs in sponsoring a Teaching Center regardless of the organization, regardless of the structure, regardless of the leadership, and regardless of the governance. The essential question is, "Who pays?" Those of us who are confronted with

shrinking budgets, tighter constraints on how monies are spent, and questions of our own accountability view the question of finances as a real one. At present, Senate Bill 2657 calls for monies to be established for Centers, ninety percent of which will be used to create Centers under teacher control. Ten percent will be available for Centers under the leadership of institutions of higher education. Is this a model that we want to maintain? What is the role of the federal government in the development of agencies that will influence teacher education at the local level? To what extent can we justify the hiring of additional staff personnel on money that is going to run out and may not be picked up. There is the further question of federal control. We've already mentioned the most likely fact that whoever pays the tab will want to have some measure as to what is done with that money. Does this control not contradict the local autonomy necessary for a Center's operation?

Somewhat relative but a quite different issue has to do with the whole question of mandate for Centers. There is in at least three states a legislative mandate that teaching centers will be established. Is this the most viable way for the movement to proliferate? Are there or have there been monies allocated by legislatures in order to make those mandates function effectively? It would seem that so long as Centers are dependent upon outside sources of funding, the movement will be at the mercy of the priorities established by those sources. This may be a more risk oriented position than the movement can stand.

In order for Centers to operate effectively with all of these other previous issues presumably settled, they still face the question which involves the territorial imperative of the various agencies. Who is

responsible for teacher education? Conventionally, we've assigned that role to institutions of higher education. They have attempted to do the job pretty much on their own with minimal assistance from the local education agencies. Today, the local education agencies are saying they have to spend so much of our time, energy and resources in the retraining of teacher education graduates, why can we not assume the responsibility for educating teacher candidates ourselves? The question essentially is, "What kind of arrangement can be created so that both of these agencies can develop an ongoing, continuous and mutually beneficial program of teacher preparation? Can the university be more responsive to the teacher needs of the local education agency? Can it relegate to the ivory tower that which is appropriate and move some of its domain off its campus? Some things may be best learned in the cloistered sanctity of the college walls, but there are many things that need to be learned in the rough and tumble world of the public schools. Similarly, can the public school system be more responsive to the reality that teacher education is not a series of plateaus, but an unending progression from entrance into teacher education program until exit? Can the local education agencies recognize that certification is not an annointing, but an intermediate step in the development of a professional? Both agencies must relinquish territory. The teacher education institutions must reward both teaching and research. The local education agencies must emphasize to its teachers that the function of the inservice education is to improve instruction, not amass credits.

The eighth critical issue revolves around evaluation. Like most of the contemporary movements to improve education, evaluation is our soft underbelly. It is to the hard-nosed, practical-minded, budget-conscious administrators the major question to which we cannot give a good answer.

The issue is not whether or not we can develop hard empirical data; the question is what kinds of empirical data are best gathered by a Center? What kinds of precise measures might a Center lend itself to determining? What kinds of soft data would be of value in determining the efficacy of the Center model? Then, related to all, of course is the question, "What kinds of questions should we be asking?" The following are suggestions. Out of them and others can come the evaluation design that would yield the kinds of data needed to convince others of the value of our cause.

A. Did the Center create a delivery system for inservice and staff development activities for the school systems it serviced? Was it used? Was it effective? How was effectiveness measured or assessed?

B. Was a process of developing a resource exchange bank created? How many resource tools are available? How many of that total were contributed by this Center?

C. How many contracts were granted for developing learning modules? How many have been completed? What has been the utilization factor of the modules?

D. How many master teachers have supervised student teachers? How many have taken "Supervising Student Teachers?" How many additional course credits were awarded?

E. How many teachers have enrolled in professional development?

F. How much circulation and utilization of the learning resources was attained by student teachers? By professional staff?

G. How would you assess the relationship between the Center and the school systems it services? What documentation is available to support that conclusion?

H. What unique programs were initiated by the Center? How can one assess their strength?

I. What general recommendations can be made to enable the Center to do its job better?

Finally, and perhaps the most basic issue of all, the one that at present has not been addressed satisfactorily concerns the ultimate client. In what ways can we determine that the existence of a Center will have, ultimately, some positive and beneficial effects on public school students?

The obvious extension of that question - if the Center does not have that kind of effect, then there are basically two directions that it must go. One, it must find ways in which it can give students that benefit or it must question the viability of its own existence. The person on the other side of the desk is the forgotten agenda item, it seems. At present the basic rationale in the movement is to say that students benefit because teachers benefit and that a good and effective teacher is going to have a positive impact in the classroom. The question is, can we be satisfied with the maxim that a "happy teacher is a better teacher?" How remiss are we in neglecting this concern as we develop our programs? How might we assess this impact?

Thus, we have enumerated and in some brief way discussed nine major issues that seems to influence development of Centers in the United States today. The order of items can be changed according to any given person's sense of priorities. The content of the issue can be argued, as people have different perspectives. That is to be expected and would be hoped for. It is the intent of this position paper that people be given an opportunity to think and clarify their own feelings and attitudes about a most significant movement on the cutting edge of education. With those thoughts in mind we propose the following:

A. That the concept of Centering be endorsed and promoted as a singularly viable way to promote ongoing teacher education and cooperation among those agencies who are a part of teacher education.

B. That the politicizing of Centers for purposes of organizational gain be denigrated as contrary to the needs of individuals in our public school and universities.

C. That any Centering model insure the use of participative techniques so that those serviced by the Center will gain a sense of ownership in the Center's existence.

D. That the governance structure of any Center be responsive to the needs and goals of the consolidated organization.

E. That the Center become a legitimate place for the professional and psychological renewal of all teachers, even those who may not be in a classroom.

F. That specific Center activities be determined through a needs assessment process involving clients, including students, in schools.

G. The federal government allocate funds to encourage the development of Centers.

H. The legislative mandates to Center be reconsidered as not the best model for further implementation.

I. That universities and public schools recognize that each needs the other in accomplishing the task of teacher education and they each set about to relinquish a bit of territory to explore new organizational patterns.

J. That existing Centers amass some hard data in response to basic research questions and that a clearinghouse for research and development in teacher Centering be established.

K. That Centers, now and later, build into their objectives a benefit effort for the public school students taught and administered by the professional serviced by a Center.

THEME TRACK PARTICIPANTS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Ken Jenkins, Chairman, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina

Mike Crosby, Wilde Lake High School, Columbia, Maryland

Yvonne Waskins, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan

David Young, University of Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland

Jorie Mark, U. S. Office of Education, Washington, D. C.

Ed Harrill, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina

Louise Maglione, Massachusetts Audubon Society, Bedford, Massachusetts

Carolyn Keith, Alexandria, Virginia

Martha Bickel, Southwestern Central High School, Jamestown, New York

Daun Nesbit, Millersville State College, Millersville, Pennsylvania

Diane Telaak, Ellicotville Central School, Ellicotville, New York

Ann Parrish, Johnston County, North Carolina

Mary Clayton, Dexter City, Ohio

Dorothy Swope, Lancaster School District, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Louanne Linde, Jamestown, New York

Robert Poczik, State Education Department, New York

Charles Lovett, U. S. Office of Education, Washington, D. C.